

**INFORMAL MEETING OF MARCH 21, 2016**

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Informal Meeting of the City Council was held in the City Council Chamber, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, City Hall, on Monday evening, March 21, 2016.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Council President James Walsh called the informal meeting to order at 6:45 o'clock p.m.

**ATTENDANCE**

Ten (10) Councillors were present, including President James Walsh and Councillors James Boone, Nathan Boudreau, Craig Cormier, Ronald Cormier, Karen Hardern, James Johnson, Marc Morgan, Paul Tassone, and Matthew Vance. Councillor Scott Graves was absent.

Others in attendance were Attorney Valerio Romano, VGR Law Firm, P.C.; Mr. David Miller, Director of Real Estate, Seven Point; Marie Swain, Director of Dispensary Sales, Seven Point; Mitch Suzan, Director of Security, Seven Point; Steve Hickox, Director of Cultivation; and, Duncan Chapman, Real Estate Representative, Northeast Real Estate Solutions.

President Walsh welcomed representatives for Seven Point of Massachusetts, Inc.

Attorney Valerio Romano introduced himself and the representatives of Seven Point in attendance. He outlined the history of the company's efforts in Illinois and most recently in Massachusetts, where they have two applications before the Department of Public Health and noted that the letter of support/non-opposition is not a regulatory requirement.

Attorney Romano informed the Council that the proposed site for the dispensary is located in the East Gardner Industrial Park at 180 Linus Allain Avenue, which is owned by Paul Roy. He said that Seven Point proposes to lease 4,800 square feet of the building's total of 10,400 square feet, entirely on the first floor. He added that the facility would only dispense and sell the product with no consumption on the site.

President Walsh questioned the reason that Seven Point elected to pursue support from the City Council and not from the Mayor.

Attorney Romano said that Community Development Director Trevor Beauregard indicated to him that pursuing the City Council's support would be more transparent, as the Council's forum would permit residents to attend.

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Noting that Worcester City Manager Ed Augustus recently negotiated a Host Community Agreement with another Marijuana Dispensary firm, President Walsh asked if Seven Point has explored a Host Community Agreement with the City.

Mr. Romano replied that Seven Point has not explored the possibility; however, Seven Point expects that such an Agreement would be considered and that the City could incorporate language in its letter of support/non-opposition making support contingent upon such an Agreement. He added that only one community in Massachusetts negotiated a Host Agreement before its letter of support/non-opposition was approved and that Seven Point would absolutely enter into a Host Community Agreement commensurate with others that have been negotiated.

President Walsh noted that only the Mayor has the authority to enter into such an Agreement, as well as to issue a letter of support/non-opposition.

Mr. Romano suggested that Seven Point would meet with the Mayor to discuss the program.

Councillor Karen Hardern remarked that if the City Council agrees to support the siting and the voters approve a ballot in question in November, then would the dispensary remain “medicinal?”

Attorney Romano responded, saying that nothing changes, because Seven Point dispenses medical marijuana. He noted that the siting of a facility in Gardner is via a Special permit, adding that it will be well scrutinized by local officials. He said that Seven Point is a Massachusetts Chapter 180 non-profit organization, and not exempt under U.S. Code 501(c)(3).

Councillor Marc Morgan questioned the planned number of employees in the facility.

Mr. Romano stated that the numbers of patients would determine the number of employees required, but he estimated that 6 to 7 employees, at a minimum, or 15 at maximum.

Councillor Morgan noted that Seven Point has also expressed interest in opening a facility in the Town of Winchendon. “How many [facilities] are you looking for?” he asked.

Mr. Romano stated that in the near future, dispensary facilities will be opened more frequently and it makes sense to site one nearby to meet the anticipated demand.

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Councillor Morgan questioned the reason for siting a cultivation plant in the Town of Ayer and not considering Gardner for cultivation. He cited that more employees would be needed if the Gardner facility included cultivation.

Attorney Romano stated that most communities are reluctant to embrace all aspects of the process – cultivation, processing, and retail. Seven Point has opportunities for two cultivation sites, one in Ayer and possibly one in Gardner. He said that Seven Point is committed to the Ayer site, as it has leased space.

On questioning by Councillor Morgan, Mr. Romano stated that the Ayer facility could employ “a couple dozen employees” since it would operate for three shifts.

Councillor James Johnson asked if the proposed remote location is Seven Point’s choice.

Duncan Chapman responded, saying that Seven Point looked at other locations, but not many buildings were available. He added that there could not be nearby schools and the space is a concern.

Referencing the current “opioid epidemic,” Councillor James Boone questioned Seven Point’s measures that would control medical marijuana in order to avoid a similar crisis, or would the State impose such measures.

Attorney Romano replied, saying that marijuana “has been stigmatized as a gateway drug that leads to opiate use” when, in fact, studies have shown that exactly the opposite. The American Medical Association recently released a study that in well-regulated medical marijuana jurisdictions, opioid mortality rates drop by 24.8%. He noted that people use medical marijuana to wean from opiate addiction.

Councillor Matthew Vance asked if Seven Point would require experienced workers for its new facility.

Mr. Romano stated that Seven Point has a Director of Cultivation that would train persons to perform the jobs. He noted that CORI and Federal background checks are required of candidates for positions in the company.

Councillor Vance questioned the reason that Gardner was selected for a dispensary.

Mr. David Miller, Director of Real Estate, stated that Seven Point investigated the area and noted its good access and patient needs.

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Councillor Vance questioned if security is a concern due to the remoteness of the proposed location.

Mr. Miller stated that security aspects are very stringent, “like Fort Knox,” citing DPH regulations that tree clearing around the facility to provide greater visibility.

Attorney Romano added that Seven Point provides home deliveries with two persons in the vehicle, GPS-tracked, no deviation from assigned routes, and live calls. He cited the need in this area as many have to grow their own plants in their homes. The Dispensary would end patient hardships and end cultivation registrations.

Councillor Nathan Boudreau asked what would prevent hospitals from dispensing medical marijuana.

Attorney Romano replied, stating that marijuana is a Schedule 1 Controlled Substance regulated by Congress, which prohibits medical use; therefore, hospitals and pharmacies do not dispense it.

He closed by saying that the letter of support/non-opposition is the first step in the application process.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

Accepted by the City Council: *April 4, 2016*